

MGF 001 - 82

6 January 1982

Memorandum for : Director, FBIS
Through : Chief, Operations Group
Subject : Monthly Report--Gulf Bureau--December 1981

I. GENERAL

Plans for a festive culmination on 16 December of month-long activities associated with national independence and the 20th anniversary of the accession to the throne by the Amir of Bahrain were abruptly cancelled at mid-month when it was disclosed that a group of some 60 conspirators planning a coup against the State of Bahrain had been arrested. Subsequent disclosures by the authorities stated that the conspirators -- mostly Bahraini nationals -- had been trained in Iran in weapons handling and sabotage and subversion techniques over a 5-6 month period. The ringleader was named to be a Shi'ite clergyman -- Imam Hadi Al-Mudarasi -- who had been deported from Bahrain in 1979.

In addition, the Iranian embassy was implicated in the conspiracy for facilitating the smuggling into Bahrain via diplomatic pouch of weapons, explosives and communications equipment. The Iranian Charge d'affaires was subsequently declared persona non grata. The Bahraini Government demanded a complete explanation of Iran's involvement in the affair; but the Iranian Government denied any knowledge of or complicity in the conspiracy.

As investigations into the incident continued, the authorities released periodic reports and photographs of weapons and equipment the conspirators had intended to use. By month's end the authorities had completed the major portion of their investigation and had made public the photographs of 12 additional conspirators who apparently managed to escape the local dragnet and flee to Iran. These 12 were given 3 months in which to return to Bahrain after which "their citizenship will be forfeited and they will be tried in absentia."

On the surface it is business as usual throughout the island. For a few days there was a noticeable increase in police visibility in and around government offices and buildings, but this has largely faded away. No bureau personnel were restricted in their movements and life has carried on as usual. Bureau operations were unhampered.

During the last quarter of 1981 the bureau supplied a copy of all incoming and outgoing Iranian and Arabic material to a BBC correspondent who was temporarily stationed in Bahrain as part of an experiment to gauge the feasibility of having such a correspondent permanently based here. We passed our material to him through the embassy PAO and retrieved it later at periodic intervals for destruction along with our other disposable paper trash. The experiment concluded in December. The correspondent was most appreciative of our support, indicating that the material had been of great value to him. He did not indicate whether the experiment had enabled the BBC to draw any conclusions on permanent basing in Bahrain.

A final Farsi/Dari monitor, recruited by headquarters from the northern Virginia area, arrived at the bureau on 15 December. The EOD of this monitor concludes the initial recruiting phase for Gulf bureau. The bureau now has on duty 14 TCN monitors and 7 local hire employees, including our custodian/driver/boardman who we employ on contract through the embassy's Master Labor Contract.

We are currently 2 under our authorized T/O of 22, but we are arranging interviews with two additional candidates -- a Kurdish-speaking candidate and a Baluchi-speaking candidate. The latter also claims fluency in Farsi, Dari, Pashto, Urdu and Brahui.

Following the assassination of President As-Sadat of Egypt in early October, the bureau joined with other Middle East bureaus in splitting up various coverage packages to maximize use of the collective FBIS Arabic monitor manpower. When we attempted to take over coverage from London PMU of several Saudi Arabian newspapers in order to free PMU monitors to assist Nicosia we discovered that certain Riyadh and Jiddah papers were unavailable in Bahrain. We have now put four of these papers on airmail subscription, and receive them with a time lag of 2-3 days. In addition to providing a reliable backstop for the PMU, the papers are also proving useful to our monitors in covering Saudi television and some Saudi radio newscasts not covered by the BBC.

II. OPERATIONS

A. Editorial/Monitorial

1. Coinciding almost to the day when the arrest of the Bahraini coup conspirators was announced, our reception of Tehran International Service in Arabic deteriorated to virtually unmonitorable on all known frequencies due to severe co-channel interference from Saudi, Bahraini and Qatari radios.

By month's end reception had stabilized on some frequencies at poor to unmonitored during the 0400-1600 GMT period and at fair during the 1630-2030 GMT period. We are hopeful that this phenomenon may simply be a seasonal deterioration and that reception will eventually return to normal during the daylight hours.

One unfortunate aspect of this poor reception is that we have lost coverage of the open Iranian Majlis sessions which had been carried live on FM and mediumwave frequencies. The often acrimonious remarks by deputies about the government's shortcomings as well as important leader statements are now only available through later regular newscasts, and often in truncated form with virtually all criticism of the government deleted.

2. The bureau was able to assist Bangkok bureau in processing a 24 December speech to the nation by Pakistani President Ziaul Haq. In addition to processing Haq's remarks on foreign policy, the bureau also provided fills and corrections to the portion of the speech processed by Bangkok.

3. Area reaction to the aborted Arab summit conference in FES, Morocco was rounded up in a five-take editorial report.

4. Efforts to monitor live the proceedings of the Armenian Supreme Soviet session were unsuccessful when Yerevan failed to air any live coverage. However, reports on the session were processed from Yerevan domestic and international service broadcasts regularly covered by the bureau.

5. A month-long study of Tehran's International Service broadcasts in Arabic, Turkish, Russian and Urdu was completed during the month. Our observations and impressions are currently being drafted for wirefiling to Analysis Group.

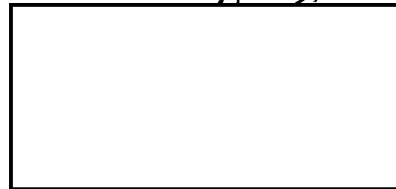
6. The bureau's daily backstop recording of the Tehran Domestic Service continues to prove its worth. In addition to enabling us to fill many indistinct words and passages in Domestic Service material processed by the BBC, we were also able during the month to phone patch two Khomeyni speeches to the BBC for processing when reception of Tehran faltered at Caversham.

B. Technical

In an effort to improve reception of radios at some distance from Gulf bureau, particularly in Soviet Central Asia and the Horn of Africa areas, we have secured the permission of the commanding officer of the small U.S. Navy installation here to erect some experimental longwire antennas on the base. Basically, the new antennas will simply be longer longwire antennas than are possible to erect on our limited bureau roof space.

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We are hopeful that "bigger will be better," enabling us to improve reception of stations currently poorly heard and possibly open up some new coverage possibilities. We will be getting underway with our experiment in January. If reception can be significantly improved or new coverage possibilities arise a remote operation may be feasible.



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Bureau Chief